

RECORDS RESEARCH
THE CORNERSTONE UPON WHICH THE PROBABLE LOCATION AND
IDENTIFICATION OF UXO CAN BE BASED

Past military practices have resulted in the presence of ordnance and explosives, chemical warfare materials hazards and other constituents at former and current military sites. The Department of Defense has been tasked with the removal of such hazards. Early on in this tasking, it was realized that to assure cost effective cleanup of these hazards we must first look into the past to gain an understanding of the processes, ordnance practices, and materials employed at these sites. Records have historically been captured in printed form and maintained for future generations in various government and private collections.

These collections are extensive and dispersed throughout the United States. Further, archival disciplines used for the management of these records are complex and not easily understood by the uninitiated environmental researcher. Lack of knowledge regarding these disciplines frequently results in inefficiency during the records collection process.

The primary sources for locating these types of records are the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Records Services Facilities, and the principal military repositories, which should be examined when compiling historical background information for former and current military sites. Historical records research is a vital part of any analysis of the processes, ordnance practices, and materials employed at these military sites.

Although the NARA was instituted only some sixty years ago, the need for a central repository for the nation's records had been recognized since the early days of the republic. At various times, public and private citizens raised their voices in favor of safe and constant storage for federal records that suffered decades of neglect. Tentative plans were developed in the early part of this century for a national archives, but World War I delayed the project. After the war, several organizations supported a renewed effort to establish a federal archives. Eventually, an appropriations bill that included funds for an archives building was signed into law; thereby, assuring the survival of these valuable federal records. On September 9, 1931, ground was broken at the site on Pennsylvania Avenue and 7th Street in our nation's capitol.

Over the decades, the nation and government grew and so did the volume of records produced. The need for additional records storage space was evident. Also, the need for construction of archives regionally throughout the country was becoming apparent. As a consequence, the Archivist of the United States of America established a regional archives system in 1969 to make regionally-created, historically valuable federal records more accessible to the general public.

It soon became apparent that records storage space within the national capitol region had to be expanded. Ground was broken on October 17, 1989, for construction of the National Archives at College Park, MD. This structure, the world's largest archives facility, was opened in the mid-90s. The NARA also has numerous other Records Services Facilities located within the National Capitol Region and regionally throughout the country. Each facility has a given geographical area for which it has records responsibility.

The NARA serves as legal custodian of records transferred by agencies, but which still belong to said agencies, while disposition is pending. Disposition could include records destruction, records transfer, or conveyance of records ownership from the originating agency to the NARA. Those federal records that are deemed to have permanent value are retained by the NARA. These records are preserved because they are important to the workings of government, have long-term research worth, provide information of value to citizens, or establish individuals' legal rights.

The NARA groups records by originating agencies. A record group is a collection of information created by a government department, agency, or organization. Record groups, in some cases, are further sub-divided into entries and/or accessions. An entry is a series of related records within a record group covering a specific time frame. An accession is a collection of correspondence, reports, histories, contracts, or other records created by an agency branch, directorate, or department, which has been transferred to the custody of a NARA Records Services Facility for storage and/or disposal.

The NARA maintains in excess of five hundred record groups. Not all record groups, however, are appropriate to each of the specific types of military sites, e.g., airfields, coastal defense sites, bombing targets, etc.

When conducting research within the NARA for a given military site, it is paramount that research include Records Services Facilities within the national capitol region as well as at the appropriate regional facility.

It is best to call ahead before visiting a national capitol region or regional NARA Records Services Facility. Calling ahead serves multiple purposes. It allows the researcher to make introductions, to assure materials availability, to become knowledgeable of the facility's administrative procedures, and to establish an archivist as point-of-contact for the visit. After initial contact with the facility, but prior to the visit, a brief written accounting of each site to be researched should be provided to the archivist. This allows the archivist to review appropriate finding aids and make recommendations as to which materials should be reviewed. This adds to the efficiency of the research visit.

Upon arrival at the facility, a researcher application must be completed in order to obtain a researcher card. Once the researcher card is issued, it is always best to consult with the archivist regarding the nature and purpose of the research. This way, if problems do arise, the archivist will have an understanding of the direction of the research and can be of better assistance.

Next, the various finding aids and inventories should be reviewed by the researcher to determine which records are going to be helpful in the search. Finding aids are provided for most record groups and are maintained in the reference rooms. Determine which record groups and which entries or accessions within a given record group are most likely to have information pertaining to the search. It should be noted that some records, although maintained within the NARA, are still owned by the originating agency and permission to view these records must be obtained from the originating agency.

Requesting records by specific box number is the most efficient way to obtain

the documents required. If box listings are not available, it is important to determine if the records in the entry are filed alphabetically by site name, by date, or by the War Department Decimal File or Navy Filing Systems. The finding aid and/or inventory will usually reveal how an entry is filed. If, however, there is any doubt, consult with the archivist. After determining which records should be reviewed, a Reference Service Slip or Reference Request must be prepared following the guidelines posted in the reference room or received from the archivist.

The safe keeping of records signed for and in the custody of the researcher is the responsibility of the researcher. Documents, photographs, maps, etc. must be handled with the utmost of care. Rules may vary slightly from facility to facility and, consequently, researchers should familiarize themselves with the rules within each facility visited and comply with them totally, e.g., cotton gloves when handling pictures, one box on the table at a time, no food or beverages allowed, removal of staples by NARA staff only, etc.

As research is being conducted and documents deemed pertinent are located, they must be tagged for copying. Additionally, at this point, it is most important for reporting purposes that the researcher document the location of all records found. The integrity of each file within a box must remain intact. Copying of documents will be completed by either the researcher or, in certain cases, by the NARA staff. Documents to be copied must be checked by a member of the NARA staff. They will prepare the document for copying and, if applicable, apply the necessary declassification markings. Copying expenses vary depending on who does the work, and the type and size of documents. Copying can usually be completed during the research visit. In some instances, however, when the NARA staff does the copying, documents are mailed to the researcher.

In some instances for a given site, even though the research strategy was most thorough, the search may result in no records being found. The lack of records could be attributable to a myriad of reasons, e.g., lost, destroyed, transferred, site being active for just a very short time, etc. Again, however, it is necessary that the researcher document all holdings searched.

There are many records repositories located within the National Capitol Region and at locations throughout the country that are not associated with the NARA. These repositories have information of considerable value when conducting records research in support of environmental cleanup at military sites.

Four military repositories which have proven to be most valuable sources for historical documentation regarding Navy, Air Force, and Army sites are the Headquarters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Office of History; the Naval Facilities Command Historian's Office; the Air Force Historical Research Agency; and the U.S. Army Military History Institute.

Headquarters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Office of History
7701 Telegraph Road
Alexandria, VA 22315
(703) 428-6558

The Office of History is located at the Humphreys Engineer Center, Fort Belvoir, VA, and holds numerous research collections relative to the military and civil works activities of the Army Corps of Engineers, with a special emphasis on military activities during the 20th Century. Among these are military reservations volumes, real estate records, the Dale F. Floyd Collection, Coast Defense Study Group Newsletters, military files, and map and image collections. These collections, especially the real estate records and the military reservations volumes, are of particular value for environmental research of former and current military sites. The former provides detailed real estate histories for military reservations in the continental United States during the 1930s and 40s. The latter consists of realty control file summary sheets which provide significant real estate data. This data, applicable to a wide variety of active and inactive Army and Air Force installations, includes the installation's official name, the authority by and date on which established, location, official purpose, and real estate acquisition and disposal actions. All collections are open for use by qualified researchers.

Naval Facilities Command Historian's Office
Naval Construction Battalion Center
ATTN: Code 10H-NAVFAC Historian
10 23rd Avenue
Port Hueneme, CA 93043
(805) 982-5913

The Naval Facilities Command Historian's Office is located in the Civil Engineer Corps-Seabee Museum at the Naval Construction Battalion Center, Port Hueneme, CA. Established in 1947 to preserve the history and achievements of the Seabees and the Navy's Civil Engineer Corps, this museum contains numerous artifacts, including weapons, Seabee crafts, model ships, and military memorabilia. The museum also houses a large repository containing a wealth of documentation pertaining to Navy sites.

Holdings at this repository include historical documents, maps, pictures, newspaper articles, and other information relating to former and active Navy sites. The volume and diversity of records at this office are such that the Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC, recommends it highly for all research being conducted in support of Navy sites.

Conducting on-site research is the preferred means of collecting information from this repository. Written requests, if not too labor intensive, are honored on a case by case basis.

Air Force Historical Research Agency

600 Chennault Drive
Maxwell Air Force Base
Montgomery, AL 36112
(334) 953-2395

The Air Force Historical Research Agency is located at Maxwell AFB, AL, site of the Air University. The agency supports the Air University, providing on-site and on-line access to historical documentation for professional military education students, university faculty, and visiting scholars conducting research. It contains over 60 million pages devoted to the history of the Air Force and its predecessor organizations. It is the world's largest and most valuable collection of documents on U.S. military aviation. Research and information collection at the agency can be accomplished using either of two methods. The first involves visiting the agency and viewing documents. This process is similar to conducting research within a NARA facility. The second is using the Internet to access the agency's database, Inferential Retrieval Indexing System, to search for microfilm reels which contain desired information. These reels are numbered and must be requested from the agency.

Furthermore, the Air University Fairchild Library, co-located with the agency, provides additional research facilities. This Department of Defense library is the largest federal library outside of Washington, DC.

U.S. Army Military History Institute

22 Ashburn Drive
Carlisle Barracks
Carlisle, PA 17013
(717) 245-3611

The U.S. Army Military History Institute is the Army's central repository for historical materials on American military history. Its mission is to collect and preserve source materials, and make them available to researchers. The Institute holds more than eight million books, periodicals, manuscripts, photographs, and audio-visual materials. No other agency has as extensive a collection of materials relating exclusively to the role of the military in the development of the United States. These holdings span American military history from the colonial period to the present. The Institute cannot conduct extensive research for patrons, but will provide limited reference assistance. Such assistance includes bibliographic guidance, access to finding aids, and reference help.

When conducting research in support of environmental cleanup at former and current military sites, including repositories such as these, will assure a complete and comprehensive historical accounting of a given site.